

Honorable Senators and Representatives,

My name is Marryem Vahidy. I am a graduate student at the UConn School of Social Work.

I am here today to testify on bill number 456, AN ACT CONCERNING HARASSMENT, ELECTRONIC HARASSMENT AND CYBER STALKING.

I support this legislation and would hope that you would support it as well.

The world of online social networking is growing at an increasing rate. Just to give you a quick look of one of the most popular social media outlets of our time, Face book: Currently Facebook has 845 million active users. It has 425 million mobile users. For every five pages a person visits online, one visit will be to a Facebook page (<http://ansonalex.com/infographics/facebook-user-statistics-2012-infographic/>).

Cyber stalking occurs many web arenas. According to the non-profit Cyber Angels cyber stalking statistics, 75% of teens use Instant Messaging compared to 42% of adults (Pew Internet and American Life Project, "Teens and Technology." July 27, 2005). Also, with the growing generation of mobile users, the harassment tends to continue through Smartphone applications and text messages.

According to the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, an estimated 3.4 million persons said they were victims of stalking during a one-year period. About half these victims experienced at least one unwanted contact per week, 11 percent had been stalked for five or more years, and one in seven moved as a result of the stalking. The study found that women are nearly three times more likely than men to be stalked and young people age 18 to 24 experiences the highest rates of stalking ([http://www.caepv.org/getinfo/facts\\_stats.php?factsec=9](http://www.caepv.org/getinfo/facts_stats.php?factsec=9)).

We all hear the stories in the news about young people committing suicide; there are many more untold stories in which the victim is forced to change their entire life as a result of constant online harassment.

In the past I have worked as a teacher's aide and afterschool enrichment teacher for a middle and high school in Hartford. Talking to the students about this issue, I learned that there are Facebook pages dedicated to listing "sluts of the school". Once a name is posted on these pages, endless comments are made about an individual, and then the conversation is carried on amongst the students in and outside of school. The victim's life changes so suddenly. One day they are laughing among their friends the next day people are laughing at them, at something they did not have any control over. Another idea to consider is how the cycle is perpetuated. One person posts another as a "slut" then that individual gets their revenge, almost always in the same way.

This bill will help give back control. It will allow people to think of the consequences of their actions online before posting. This bill proposes that the person convicted can be ordered to see a psychiatrist, which may help stop the cycle of harassment.

I appreciate the opportunity to present my testimony. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

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